Street Games and Traditional Games for Early Learners

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Educational projects among children, rural tribal or urban slum, have had two major problems. Firstly, a lack of materials and secondly a certain disinterest on the children's part, an irregularity of attendance and a dropping out. Often enough, economic necessity and a greater responsibility in the family is going to make school hours limited.

Whenever attempts have been made to analyse reasons, the arguments put forward have been that the school system is too rigid and dull, lessons too difficult and the teacher lacks the training and means for a more imaginative effort. There are other reasons which are just as relevant. Children in the rural areas are used to roaming free, the slum children live in the streets, play around, and have not known the disciplines of staying indoors unless it is too dark or the weather too inclement.

While the child would rather not be in school he would be playing amongst his friends, a number of **street games** like 'gulli danda' (a small stick hit with a larger one), 'Pitthu' (seven stones placed one on top of another, to be hit with a ball), marbles, spinning tops, with a string tightly wound around. Girls might be playing 'langri' (hopping on one foot to catch others), 'Pacheta' (5 stones). Every generation and every locality, however small, has its own games, often with different ways of playing the same game.

Since Bombay is a city of highrise apartments and its adjoining slums — 'school' for us, in our locality, is a 'dual' school, the morning preschool that is financially self-supporting while the afternoon Balwadi is a free-school with a mixed age grouping and is on total voluntary effort. We are learning to work on a minimum budget basis and devise ways to learn for a group of 2½ to 14 year olds, some in municipal schools in the morning, some not have been to school at all and some who are working.

Our efforts are small-scale and practise-oriented and have led to the development of a few resources and thinking practices, especially in promoting early reading. Being preschool people the orientation has been on playing games. Learning through games has a number of advantages. It allows for physical mobility, has an attention focussing quality and the excitement of directly seeing the results of ones action.

Besides a number of street games and toys, educational variations have extended to **traditional games** like 'chaupat,' and 'Ganjifa.' Traditional Indian games are not inferior in quality or standards of safety because they have been crafted to give joy. We are slowly forgetting these wonderful games and tend to store them away as heirlooms or discard them. If families, communities and schools once again took pride in them, we might have a rich source to draw upon.

'Our Project on **Street Games &
Traditional Games** is derived in the
hope that teachers and people working
with children in countries where
resources are scarce, could utilize this
medium of games already prevalent in
the community.

Our objectives are

— to use street games and traditional
   games which require practically no
   materials and are commonly known.

— to modify these games to provide
   different stimuli.

— to make them more thought
   provoking, often utilising them to
   promote greater numeracy and
   literacy.

— to attempt to promote the idea that
   there are many ways to play a game
   besides those that already prevail,
   for, a game is fun, has an inherent
   challenge and can be modified.

The total project is limited to a variety of
games commonly prevalent in most
parts of the country. I am sure many
more can be included and suggestions
for varied use would be derived
accordingly. Rules can be simplified,
modified and created, to suit age levels
and needs. Here, perhaps a little
systematic orientation and planning by
people who spend time with young
children would not be amiss. We as
adults need to learn to promote play, to
be able to achieve the objectives and
aspirations of child development and
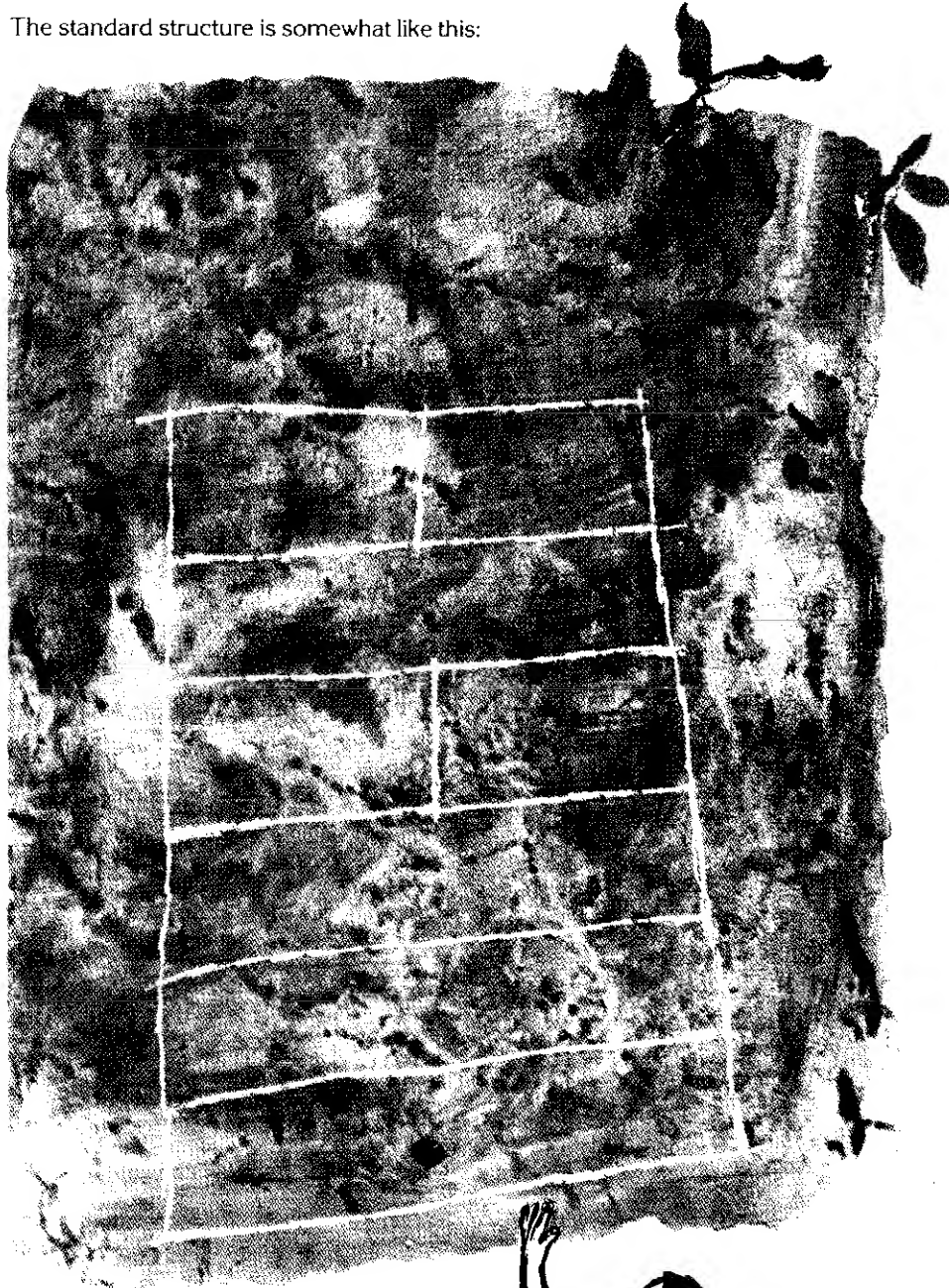learning through the medium of play.

HOPSCOTCH

Among games played on the street or in a compound, one of the commonest is 'Hopscotch'. Here in India children would call it 'Ikki Dukki'.

The standard structure is somewhat like this:

This diagram is made on the ground with a stick, or with a chalk on paved stones. All you need is a flat little stone to throw and children go hopping and jumping over compartments. This is a very familiar sight in most areas and girls seem to take a great delight in it. It is an absorbing and totally inexpensive game.

Variations

**1** The first variation was numbering it 1-9 (rather than 8) to cover all the 'ones'. Throw, count and play onwards.

9	
8	
7	
6	
5	
4	
3	
2	
1	

a) Throw the stone in 1 — jump over 1 — hop into 2..3..4..5..6..7..8..9.. and jump out. Then throw the stone in 2 hop into 1, jump over 2, hop in 3..4..5..6..7..8..9.. and jump out. Number recognition did become easier.

b) We had a second variation to help us overcome the problem of comprehending what comes '**before**' a certain number. The simplest solution was to promote a backward count. So we throw in 1, jump over 1, hop in 2..3..4..5..6..7..8..9.. then turn around, hop back 9..8..7..6..5..4..3..2. We got it, it was like a rocket countdown.

c) This Hopscotch even helped the idea that there are two sides, throw on the numbered side, hop on the unnumbered side.

d) Next we attempted to cover alternate number sections with red cardboards. Now we could learn **odd** and **even numbers** and **colours.**
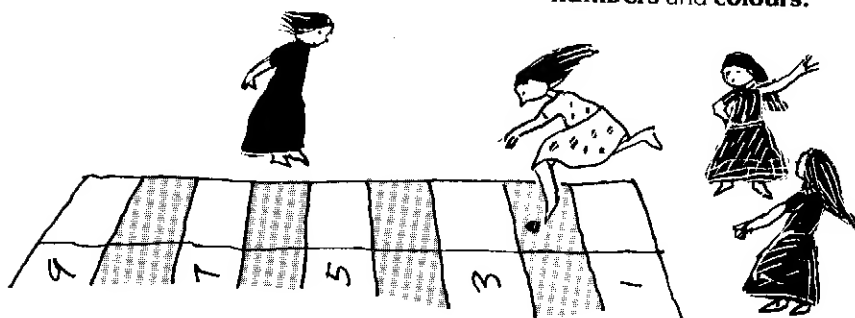
8	
6	
4	
2	

2 A different variations was adopted which resembles a 'boggle' set. This time the diagram was a square with 9 squares within. Children learning letters found it tough to remember 'matras' or the addition of a part-symbol required to add the vowel sound to a letter. This is the problem of many phonetic Indian languages like Hindi. Out of an array of eleven major part-symbols that contribute vowel additions we chose the simpler two to begin with

— the sound of 'a' is denoted by $\top$

— the sound of 'i' is denoted by $\mathsf{-\!\!\!\!1}$

The name of a child in the Balwadi group is 'Rani', all that she usually writes for her name is 'Rn'.

a) So we began a **hopscotch of letters.** You can jump only to the squares that connects to the one you are in. I wrote the word and Rani had to hop and show the sequence of letter and vowel symbols that made the word. This led to other words that rhymed with 'Rani'. 'pani' (water), 'dhani' (yellow colour). We made simpler words using only one vowel symbol. 'dan' (give), 'pan' (leaf), 'dhan' (grain).

b) We varied it and made it like **a reading game.** One child hopped and showed the sequence of the word, others read it.

c) Sometimes they even **wrote** it.

d) We used the square as a **'riddle game'.** What did Rani bring?—Guess and jump 'pani' (water).

What colour did she wear? 'Dhani' (yellow)

This helped ascertain the **meaning of the words** too.

The same structure could be simplified to deal with only one vowel. eg. the sound of 'a' — 'T' to the first and second letter. eg. 'tala' (lock), 'kala' (black) 'mala' (necklace), 'nala' (ditch) 'jala' (web).

The letters and vowels can be varied as the need to practise a particular vowel arises. eg.

MARBLES

Marbles are prized possessions of boys all over. There are a number of ways that children play marbles, and a number of ways we can devise to play more, just the way we need to learn something in particular.

Shapes — form a integral part of early learning.

1 Marbles are often played within a **triangle.** A triangle is drawn on paved areas with a chalk or with a stick on the ground. A total of 7 or 9 or 10 (the number can be varied).

Then a line is drawn about 7 feet away from where each one tries to hit a marble. It is 9 pins or bowling or what you call it! If you hit, the marble is yours, so you may **get more** and there will be that many **less** within the triangle.

Who got **more?**

Ramesh got	2
Ajay	1
Santosh	3	He **won**
Haliya	1
Parag	0
Sai	0

7 **take away** 1 will leave 6
6 **take away** 1 will leave 5,

2 The **square** or **don** has a square chalked out,and the marble arrangement could vary from 5 i.e. one in each corner and one in the middle, to 9 or 12.

When the player attempts to hit any marble inside the square and hit it out of the square the number of marbles he rolls out of the square are his. The winner will have the **most** marbles. Again as marbles roll out, the marbles within the square will become **less**

$$12 - 1 = 11$$
$$\text{then } 11 - 2 = 9$$

Now there are only 9 left and so the game continues.

It always helps to have a board and chalk around so that symbols like + — — also become a part of the game.
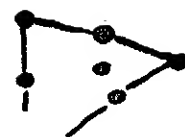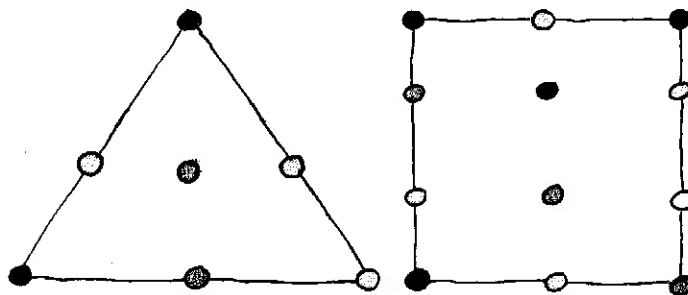
3 Again we draw a **square** on the ground, this time dividing it into 9 squares with a hole dug in the middle to put the marbles.

Now we have 9 marble pits.

Each of the two players gets 6 marbles each — one gets the dark ones, other the transparent ones, and the game proceeds like noughts and crosses. i.e. 1st player puts one marble, then the second gets a turn to put his 1st marble. Both will try to make **a line horizontal, or vertical or diagonal.** The winner is the one who succeeds.
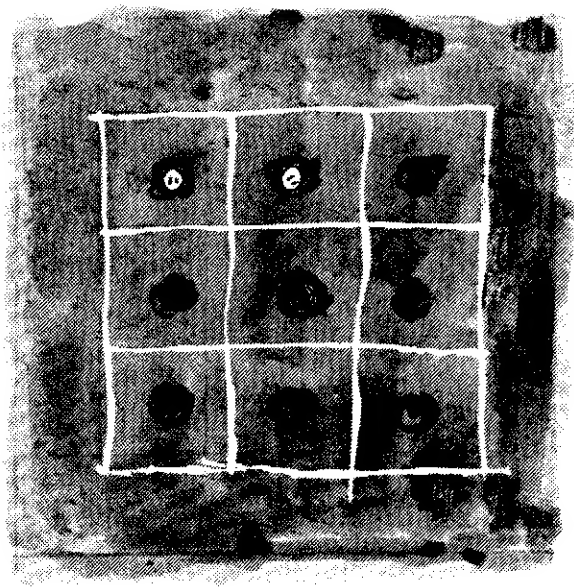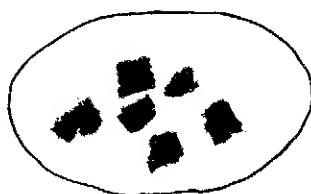
Recording

Each time one person wins we try and chalk up a tally on the board, or with a piece of stick on the ground.
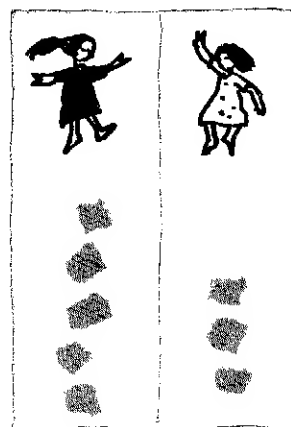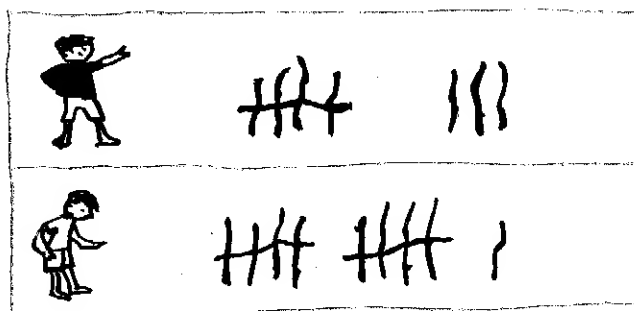
We used stone or bits of tiles as counters

Circle within a square (Koyaba)

4 The one who enters the circle with the throw of his marble first begins the game. Then the other player puts 2 marbles within the square saying the 'word' (KOYABA or whatever you would like to call it).

The first player makes an attempt to hit them with his marble so that he could roll them out of the square. When hitting, his marbles must bounce within the square. As long as he hits any marble he can play again. The game has more rules than the 'triangle' or 'square' and there are two shapes one within the other.

These are standard games but rules can be modified to suit the purpose. A combination of shapes and a learning to count 1-9 with many of its number values could be easily acquired.

eg. 7 $1 - 6$ $2 + 2 = 4$
 $7 - 1 = 5$ $1 + 3 = 4$

Counting in '2s' like placing two as in koyaba, or '3s' as in noughts and crosses, or '5s' like in keeping a tally of 5, become integral parts of the game and provide varied mathematical practise and vocabulary.

King & Queen

5 A small pit is made in the ground. The player attempts to put his marble in the pit. The one who succeeds is the **king** and proceeds to hit the others' marbles. This game attempts at aiming and hitting and approximating distance, rather than acquiring marbles.

Tens & Twenties

6 Tens & Twenties is a variation of King and Queen played to a count of 10s i.e. 10 for the first hit, 20 for the second till the player is out. Again recording your wins becomes necessary but this time it will have to be in 'tens'
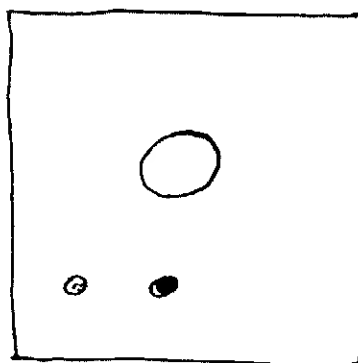
PITTHU

Another common street game
where children collect bits of tile
(usually broken clay tiles from
roofs) and make a graded tower
of seven. Montessori materials
have a variety of size-
gradation equipment — the pink
tower, the round inset on a stick,
the square ones on a stick,
graded from big to smaller and
smaller, the top one being the
smallest. These pyramid like
structures or size gradations are
an integral part of early learning
materials. Similarly these pieces
of tiles are always arranged so
that the biggest lies at the
bottom, a slightly smaller piece
forming the 2nd from the bottom
and building up to 7 with the
smallest tile resting on top. You
will see that when the pile is being
made, if one of the younger ones
cannot do the job correctly, an
older child will invariably break
up the pile and set it up again.
Every time the 'Pitthu' pile is
broken with a ball it has to be built
up again (so that there is ample
practise in size discrimination),
which makes one think the
material ideally suited for
teaching **size gradation**
whenever the pile breaks.

Once the pile is broken by one
party, the other party attempts to
'hit' them with a ball to make
them get 'out' since they dared to
break the pile.

The street games are mostly
totally inexpensive, most children
know how to play them and
involves a lot of movement. They
are by far the most successful,
learning games we have
experienced.
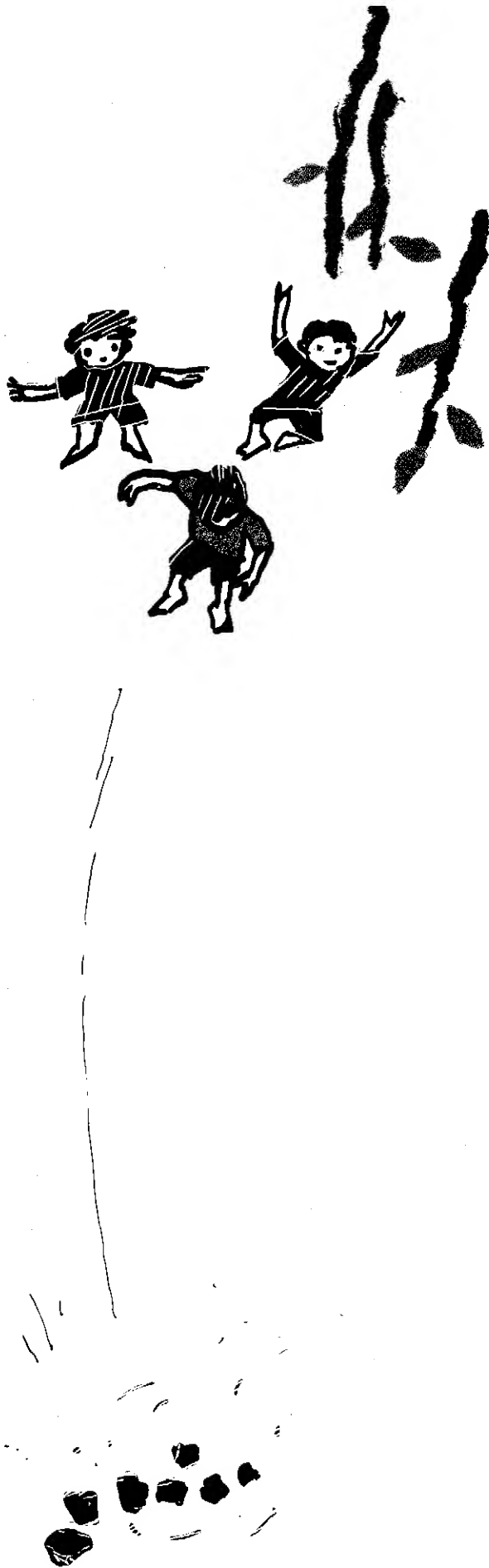
PACHETA

Pacheta Pachinka or 5 stones

Just as boys tend to play marbles, girls in most places seem to play 5 stones. In the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat the stones are neat cubes made of lac, yellow, green, red or black, with a 'laheria' design on it. They are very attractive and inexpensive. In the absence of these, girls carefully choose **5 stones** or pebbles to play the game.

The player throws the 5 stones on the ground, then picks up one and throws it in the air, picks up 1 off the floor before catching the one coming down.

She continues to pick up all 4 in the same manner. Then at the next throw she attempts to pick up 2 tog, and again 2 together, then 3 and 1, then all 4 at the same throw. Here we have all possible combinations of 4 and 5. Usually the game is played with one hand i.e. the same hand picking up and catching, but it would help if the younger children used both hands. Besides building up eye hand co-ordination the number values of 5 are naturally acquired.
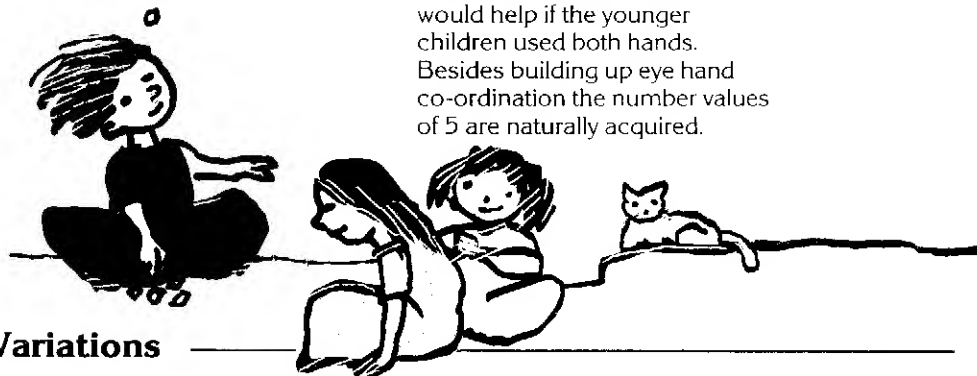
Variations

5 stones or 6 or 7 can be improvised to acquire a quick count correctly — eg.

a) How many? Every player in the group gets 7 stones (or 8 or 9 or 6). The player whose turn it is has his hands behind — suddenly he puts a pile in the middle (it does not have to be all the stones he has).

The others have to answer at once as to how many? eg. if there were 6 stones in the pile the first person who says 6, **gets** a stone from the player, at the same time the one who answers wrongly has to **give** a stone to the player.

The winner naturally is the one with the **most** stones eventually.

Conkers, bits of tile, smooth pebbles all are adequate for the game. The objectives of quick and correct counting upto 9 can be fulfilled by a slight change in the rules and numbers of stones to be used.

b) How many of each colour?

'Pachetas' are available in different colours. We take two different coloured sets of 5 making 10 all together eg. 5 yellow 5 green.

Now the player whose turn it is, has all the ten and may put in the middle some of each colour eg. 3 yellow 3 green, and covers the pile with his hand so that the others in the circle have had just a quick glimpse.

The others try to tell precisely how many of each did they see, and how many all together.

eg. Answers could be

3 yellow + 2 green — 5 altog.
4 yellow + 2 green — 6 altog.
3 yellow + 3 green — 6 altog.

## c) Catch & tell.

Play the game of pacheta according to its basic rules i.e. throw the stone and pick up but using 10 cubes. The leader calls out different combinations eg. 3+2+1.

The player throws one cube and picks up 3 and then throws and picks up 2 at the second throw, and then 1 at the third throw — telling the **total** '6'. Count the winning rounds by keeping a tally.

ANTAKSHARI

'Antakshari' is common among children and adults in most states of India — In fact, whenever there is a group that delights in being together, they do seem to want to sing. 'Antakshar' is the last letter of the song that one team sings — the other team takes up the sound of the last letter to begin a song with it. This game is popular among all, whether literate or illiterate.
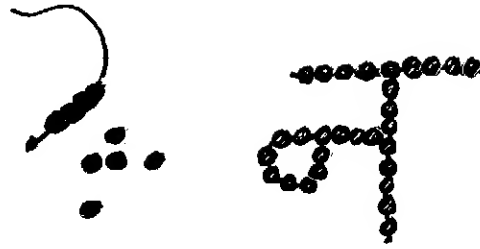
Variations:

a) This gave us the idea of using its popularity to begin **recognition of letter shapes** since sounds were already being identified. Rajasthan, Gujarat, Kathiawar and Kutch are states where bead work is commonest. We collected bits of wire to thread beads and added a box of a few bead-letters to the game. We began with a few consonants that occur more often. Now it was necessary to pick up the last letter and put it in the middle for the other group to **recognize** and start the next song.

b) Letters could be made with rope pieces and sticks too. A box full of pieces of rope and small wooden sticks are put in the middle. Each party when having finished a song, sends the singer into the centre circle marked on the ground. Here he has to **'make'** the last letter eg. a stick forms the central line of ' क', and rope is used for the curved lines.

MAGIC WINDOWS
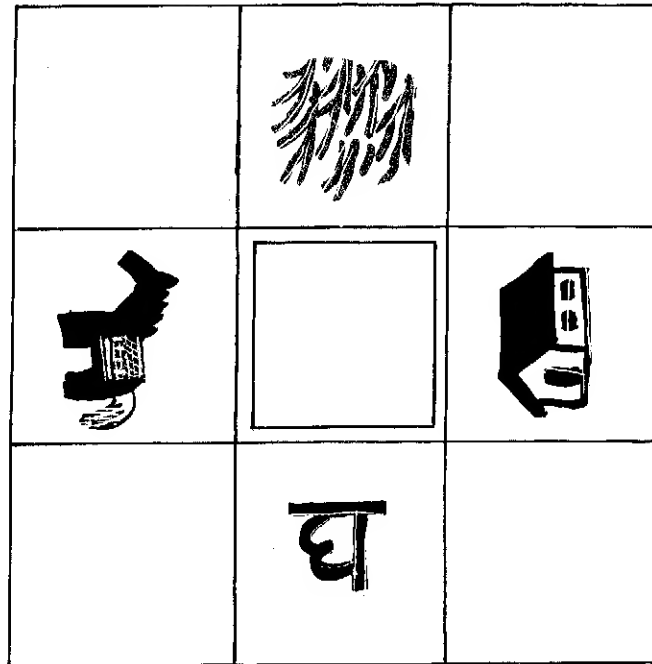
This is a rectangle of paper with three folds widthways and lenghways, making nine rectangles within the main rectangular piece. The centre 'window' or rectangle is cut and replaced with a piece of transparent glass. The inner side has four different pictures which when folded correctly would only show one picture at the transparent window.

The little piece of paper with a glass in it, is commonly sold by the toy vendors for 25p-50p. The pictures usually are of trains, horses, buses, etc.

You set about asking your friends which picture would he like and then you fold the paper and show him precisely the picture that he chose — the trick of course is to fold in that particular picture towards the glass first of all.

Variations

We made our own magic windows using a plastic window instead of glass and decided to put pictures that began with the same sound — 3 pictures and the letter making the 4th, thus reinforcing the sound of a particular letter. eg. 'm' 'ma' (mother) 'machchali' (fish), 'mor' (Peacock).

The magic windows are delightful and inexpensive.
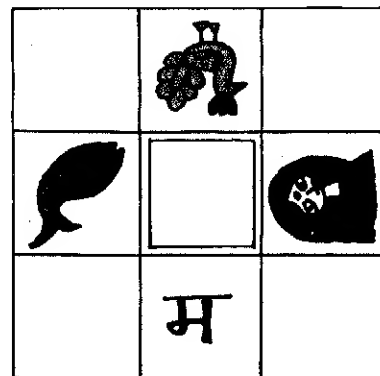
TOPS

Spinning tops with string is another favourite past-time among boys. The winding of the twine, the twist of the wrist, and the surface of the ground make the spin. The question always is **how long will it spin?** Which seems an ideal way to talk about **time.**

a) There is a clock with a 'seconds' hand — Each spin is timed and recorded. eg. Ajay 7 seconds, Gopal 3½ seconds, Babloo 4½ seconds, Who makes it to **a minute** first? 5 minutes first?

b) After acquiring a certain approximation of time — when one spinner makes his throw others approximate the time at the beginning of the spin. The closest approximator gets the next turn.
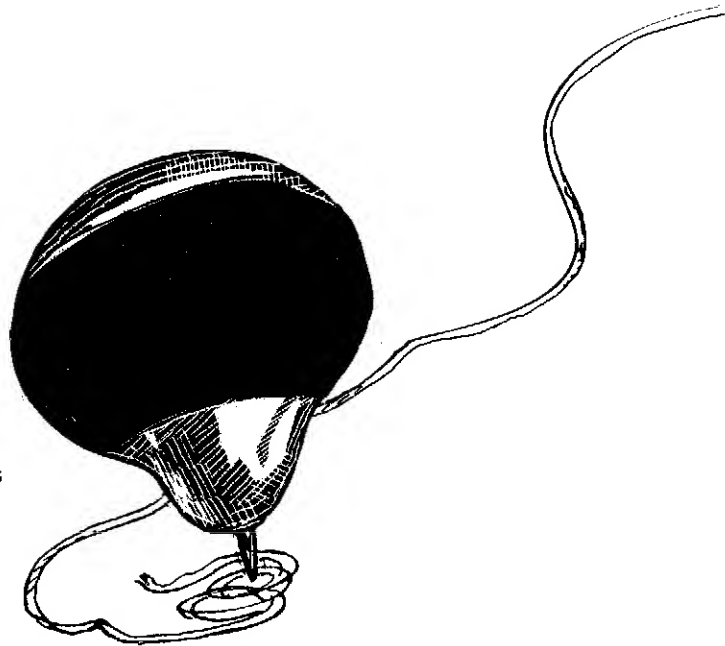
CHAUPAR or CHAUPAT

This is a traditional Indian game the approximate meaning may be translated as 'Four paths'.

It is played on a foldable piece of highly decorative cloth — worked by hand in quilt or often the most gorgeous hand woven bead designs. The areas of Kutch and Saurashtra are well known for the decorative **'chaupats'**. Every family would have its hand-woven or embroidered bead-cloth.

The game allows four players, each player, having four soldiers that would travel over the roads to the safety of the fort. The soldiers are conical pieces of wood gaily painted in two colours.

The best part of the game is the 'throw'. No dice for these but six cowrie shells, evenly matched are held between cupped palms and rattled and thrown, the rattling of the shells adds great excitement. The interpretation of the throw depends on how many are **open** and how many **'closed'**. Soldiers move over the cloth board like a game of ludo, but they have to prove themselves soldiers by atleast killing one before entering the home front. If you do not quite reach home and exceed the last throw then you might have to walk in reverse. It is an exciting and aesthetically beaufitul game.

Variations

For young children the game is admirably suited, for it is very attractive, practically unbreakable and the cowrie-shell
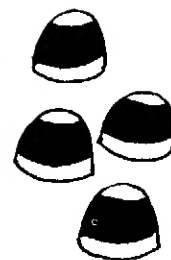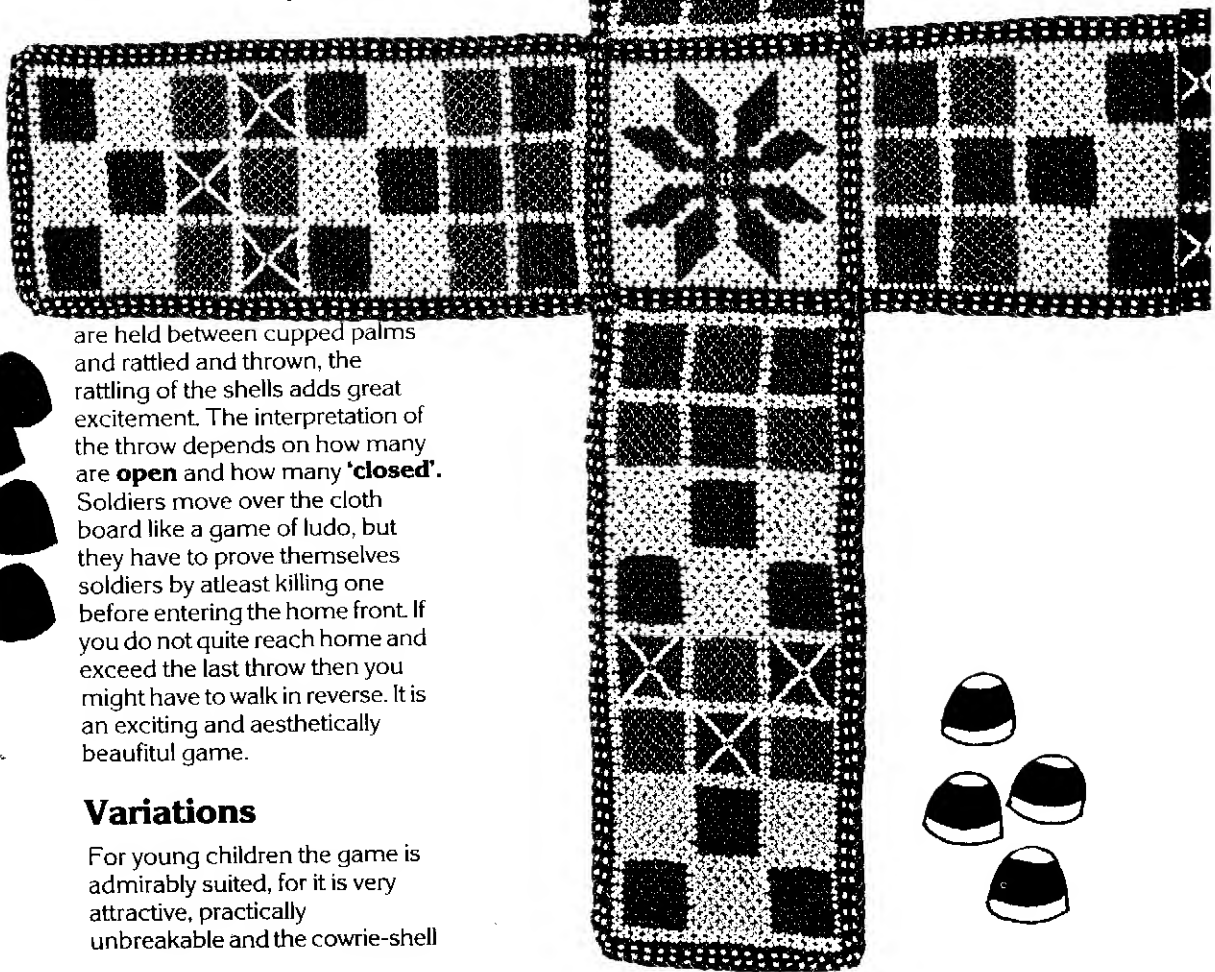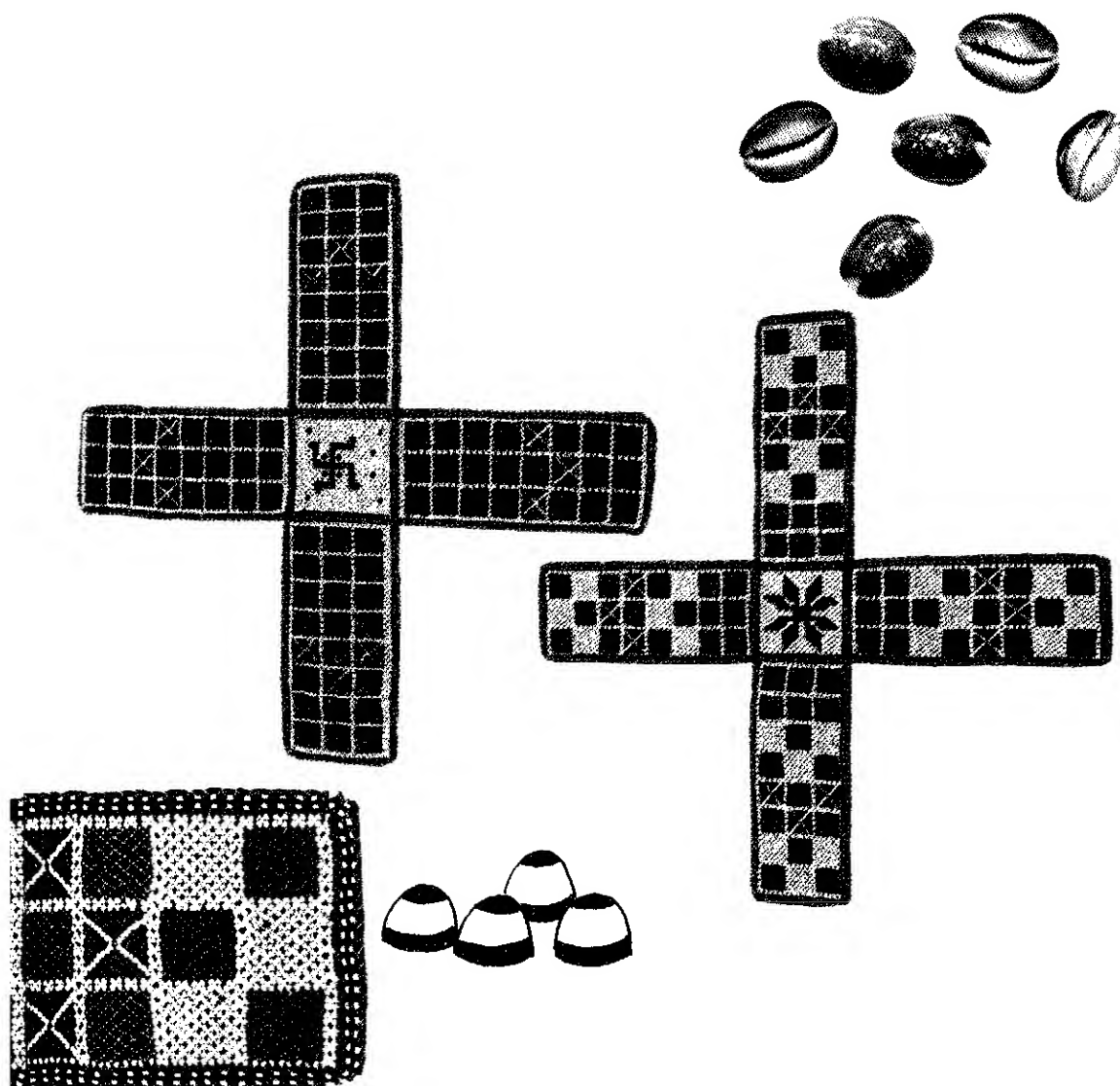
throws are fun. We have
simplified the throws by omitting
the different interpretations of 25,
12, 10 and have adopted the
1,2,3,4,5,6 (since there are just 6
shells). Counting, moving, killing
is enjoyable, incidentally we can
also tell how many are 'open' and
how many are 'closed' or
upside-down out of the six shells.

1 If 3 are 'open' then, the
player moves three steps
starting from his own path. When
he completes the round and
comes back to his own path he
can 'turn in' and get to the
'winning post'.

The 'throw' and 'count' changed
according to our need.

2 Children learning
multiplication tables
needed practise. We adopted the
4 times table therefore every
throw eg. 3 open meant $4 \times 3 -$
12. Move 12 steps. To help
during weaker days of
multiplication table learning we
put the table on blackboard to
consult.

$4 \times 1 - 4$
$4 \times 2 - 8$
$4 \times 3 - 12$
$4 \times 4 - 16$
$4 \times 5 - 20$
$4 \times 6 = 24$

After a week or so we did not
really need it at all.

DASHAVTAR GANJIFA

In the district of Ratnagiri and Konkan, these traditional 'ganjifa' or 'playing cards' are still produced. The areas have tales to tell of the various types of beautiful playing cards that were in vogue upto two generations ago. The cards are circular discs of wood, as fine as the plastic playing-cards of today. They are intricately hand painted and lacquered. Pictures of Kings on horses, Gods and Godesses with their emblems and weapons make the most exquisite miniatures. The disc is finished with a border design.

'Dashavatar' depicts the ten incarnations of the Lord Vishnu. These have been put in verse by the Poet Jaydev and danced through the classical mediums of Bharat-natyam and Manipuri. To explain the dashavtar simply would be to say that whenever the earth was oppressed by evil, the Lord came down from heaven in different forms.
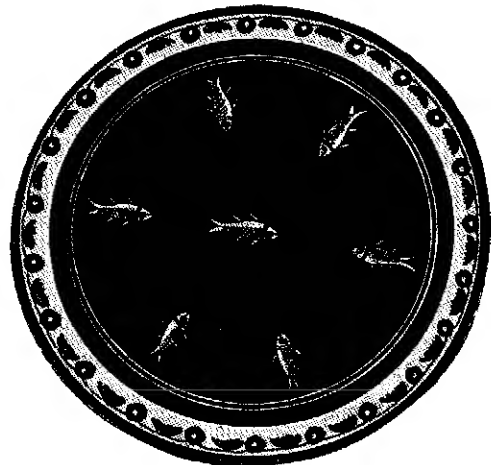
Each incarnation has its own reason. The lord has been known to be born in the form of an animal, half animal, half man, brahmin, prince. Every time he fought evil his weapon varied according to his physical characteristics. Therefore an incarnation has a specific emblem which characterizes it. These symbols form the 1 to 10 card set of each incarnation headed by the picture of the 'avatar'.

The original cards are 12 × 10 = 120.
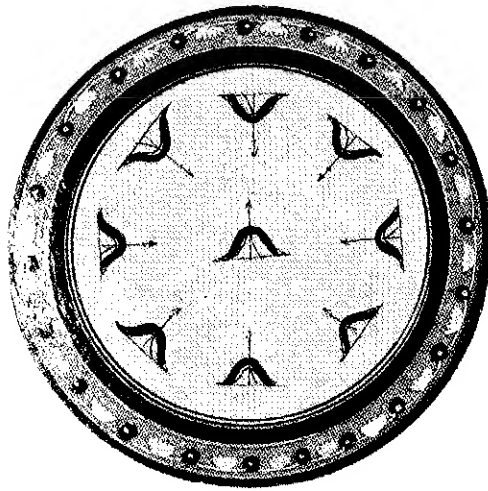
Variations

a) We used sets of 30 with young children i.e. 3 incarnations at a time. 3 children chose one set. This was facilitated by the basic colour and the emblem — it provided a simple **matching** exercise.

b) Then one threw a 5 bow emblem. The other had to find a 5 of the fish emblem which he held — the third had to find his 5 with the axe emblem.

Here we **matched numbers** and checked the cards for counting correctly.

c) We also could identify the 3 'avatars' or incarnations, since the stories are wonderful anyway.

d) Each player had one set of a different **colour,** therefore 10 could play at the most. One player throws the card and covers it after allowing a quick look to all eg. '8' others had to find an 8 in their set and throw it. The player picked up the thrown pile and checked who threw 8. All the correct throws were put aside and the 'wrong' throws returned to the respective players. The one who discarded all the cards first was the winner

This helped achieve a quick number count twice over.

Ordinary playing cards serve the same purpose for (a) and (b)., although they may be less attractive.